

BOARD OF HEALTH

OF THE

STATE OF LOUISIANA.

ITS POLICY DECLARED IN THE RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED AT
THE REORGANIZATION, APRIL 12th, 1884.

Inaugural Address of the President to the Board.

ACTION OF LOCAL MEDICAL AND HEALTH ASSOCIATIONS.

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NEW ORLEANS:
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BOARD OF HEALTH,

STATE OF LOUISIANA.

This Board has been reorganized by the election of several new members, and the selection of Joseph Holt, M. D., to be its President.

The Board now consists of Joseph Holt, M. D., J. C. Faget, M. D., L. H. Von Gohren, M. D., L. F. Salomon, M. D., S. R. Olliphant, M. D., Charles E. Kells, D. D. S., Walter M. Smallwood, Esq., Joseph A. Shakespeare, Esq., and Joseph Kohn, Esq.

The following resolutions, introduced by Col. W. M. Smallwood and unanimously adopted at the first meeting of the Board, April 12th, 1884, expresses the policy and the plans it will pursue in endeavoring to prevent the introduction of contagious or infectious diseases into this port:

RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED APRIL 12th, 1884.

Fully recognizing the wisdom of the quarantine laws of this State, the necessity of their rigid enforcement, and the great importance of securing for this board the confidence of the people throughout the valley of the Mississippi.

Resolved, That it is the fixed and irrevocable purpose of this board to apply quarantine restrictions against all ports where contagious or infectious diseases exist to the limit of the law, and, if necessary, it will advise total suspension of all communications with such ports while so infected.

Resolved, That while we are guarding with sleepless vigilance the outlets of the Mississippi River, we are not unmindful of the dangers that threaten us from the rear. In more than one instance yellow fever has been introduced into this city and State through the States of Texas and Mississippi. All things considered the least protected sections are the long lines of seacoast westward in Texas and eastward in the States of Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. The approaches from without to this State are through Lake Borgne, the Mississippi River and Berwick's Bay. These we will guard with sleepless vigilance, and while we are doing that, we call upon the authorities of the States of Texas, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida to exercise a like effective control over the seacoast in those States.

Resolved, That while this board will maintain its just prerogatives as a department of the State Government, it invokes the co-operation and confidence of any and all organizations at home and abroad that may be laboring to promote or protect the public health.

Resolved, That recognizing the great importance of securing the co-operation of Boards of Health of the States, and of other health associations, wherever situated, and establishing a condition of absolute confidence, it is hereby made the duty of the president and other officers of this board to extend to Boards of Health of other States, and other health associations unrestricted access to the records and health reports of this board, as well as the several quarantine stations as at the central office of this board in New Orleans; and it is hereby further made the duty of the president of this board to make public, from day to day, as may be necessary, the condition of the public health; and he is hereby specially required, in the event yellow fever should be introduced into this city or State, to communicate such fact, without delay, to the Exchanges and commercial bodies in New Orleans, and to the Boards of Health of other cities and States.

Resolved, That the co-operation of the several Exchanges and commercial bodies of this city is earnestly solicited in the sanitary work of this board, and in the proper, intelligent and effective application of the sanitary and quarantine laws of this State.

Resolved, That while tendering to other boards and health associations generally at home and abroad, the courtesies and confidence of this State Board of Health, we solicit the like consideration of the boards of health and health associations of other States, to the end that confidence may not only be reciprocal, but established on a firm and enduring basis.

Resolved, That having thus declared our purposes and the policy of this Board, it is expected that no credence will be given at home or abroad to any reports respecting the state of the public health in this city or State that are not sanctioned or verified by the action of this board, or of its duly appointed officers.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT TO THE BOARD.

At the meeting of the State Board of Health, held April 24th, Dr. Joseph Holt delivered the following address :

Gentlemen of the Louisiana State Board of Health:

Public welfare outweighs private interest. This is not only an organic law of society, but the very core around which all law and all association are compacted, and from which emanates the cohesive force which binds man in communities and nations. The recognition of this law is instinctive.

Whether as civilian or soldier, a cheerful readiness to obey is the current stamp of manhood, the test of true citizenship.

We are assembled as members of the Louisiana State Board of Health, not of ourselves; for as a matter of selection we would have avoided rather than sought positions so responsible, so onerous, burdened with solici-

tude, and offering as reward little more than the consciousness of duty performed.

The people of this city and the authorities of this State have, of their own advice and pleasure, selected us the bearers of this burden, the history of which is appalling to selfish prudence, and must awaken in the wisest serious hesitancy.

The alternatives have been squarely presented, and we have been compelled to accept with all that acceptance implies, or to shirk a public duty.

The time for hesitation has passed.

We are committed to this work, and are resolved to push it with all the energy of which we are capable.

A warrantable prudence, however, demands that we shall definitely understand and announce the exact nature and limit of the responsibility assumed ; that we shall make a clear statement of our case, and stand on record as to our position.

Resolutions indicating the policy of this board were adopted at our organization. These have been broadly promulgated, and are the foundation on which we build.

As sworn officers we will maintain the prerogatives of the board as a department of State government, and will resent instantly an encroachment from any quarter.

We italicize this resolve.

The hearty co-operation of the Boards of Health of the States, and of all health associations, is an imperative duty common to all. Antagonisms neutralize effort ; so the good which would be accomplished fails ; and in the turmoil of personal disagreement we forget our mission, and the people have to bear the brunt. When these bodies foster ill will they betray the public trust.

A calm and unswerving adherence to right is heroic, but the fomentor of discord is a traitor to sanitary reform, and is himself a public enemy, it matters not what station he may occupy or position assume.

We recognize in the Auxiliary Sanitary Association of this city an organized system of help in the great work of municipal sanitation. If we can but keep in mind the higher interest of the community as the rule of our guidance, this association must be to us a right arm, an engine of power. It is simply an expression of concentrated effort on the part of a people determined to help themselves.

But let us return to the discussion of our responsibilities.

What have we undertaken and what is expected of us to do? Let us grapple at once the main issue, the paramount object of this board.

To prevent the appearance of yellow fever in New Orleans is the master task assigned us. How are we to do it? What is yellow fever? From whence does it come?

Now, gentlemen, we stand face to face with our problem, and must solve it or abandon the fight! There must be no mincing of words, or deference to popular opinion. We are not dealing with men or the opinions of men, but with a mystery in nature; one of the hidden ways of God. It matters not what men may think or assume, we are dealing with nature and with fact. The savage in his terror shoots his arrows at the face of the sun. Presently the shadow of eclipse passes off, and he says "I did it."

Let us lay it down here as recorded, gentlemen, that this board is strictly practical. While accepting the teachings of science, we are not to array ourselves as partisans in the contests of pathological investigators; in discussions of the beneficent influence of filth upon this community; the germ theory, or any other question in dispute.

These subjects of discussion and dissension are properly a fighting ground for the doctors, for investigating commissions, the press, and a host of others, but not for us. The law defines our field of action.

From the vast accumulations of experience, both here and abroad, there are certain conclusions we as a Board of Health may accept as facts sufficient to cover the case as we have to deal with it.

The first conclusion is remarkable. According to the testimony of all investigators and travelers in the West Indies, Mexico and South America, there is no spot where yellow fever originates. It is invariably brought from some other place. Therefore, yellow fever never originates, but is always brought from somewhere else.

But what is this deadly agent with which we have to deal? How shall we tell of it? And how shall we locate its essential part to bring it within the grasp of thought?

In order to take the next step, we must give to this subtle something a definition above the reach of quibbling criticism. Yellow fever is due to a specific poison, the existence of which is known only as manifested in man. Intangible, imponderable, unrecognizable to any of the senses, we have no positive knowledge of the essential nature

of this poison. Every effort to prevent its appearance and to limit its spread must therefore be purely experimental.

We next declare that wherever originated, it is communicable, and can be conveyed in the recognized methods along highways of commerce by ships and other carriers of fomites.

In regard to the transmission of yellow fever, it is sometimes impossible to determine the boundary line between contagion, strictly speaking, and infection.

There can possibly exist but two sources of its appearance in New Orleans. It must be recently imported or it must develop locally.

Being transmissible, it can certainly be imported.

Before touching the next point let us call to mind that men hold their opinions concerning the origin and spread of yellow fever as tenaciously and with as little tolerance as they do their religious creeds. A difference of opinion is heresy.

There are those, and I announce myself as of their number, who hold that it is possible, and experience abundantly justifies the declaration, that yellow fever may be called into activity in New Orleans without recent importation, or importation at all, so far as we are able to decide.

I have myself seen this disease appear here under circumstances which baffled every effort of attending physicians and boards of health with their corps of sanitary police to detect the slightest clew to importation.

To declare such a case imported is simply an assertion not warranted by evidence. An instance of "*brought from somewhere else.*"

In making this declaration I cast no slight nor injurious censure upon this city. New Orleans will never be quarantined against unless infected; but if infected, will be quarantined against, it matters not whence the disease.

All epidemic diseases have their cycles—seasons of intense activity and periods of remission or of absolute rest.

A city may go for years without an invasion, even though cases may have occurred in the meantime; and presently, from evident importation or from an unknown source, an epidemic breaks out and ravages a community. Witness scarlet fever, diphtheria, small-pox, measles.

How easy to understand that we may go four years and keep out infected ships, and keep this city clean and escape yellow fever, and hand over this Board of Health to others. Our successors, even more vigilant and exacting,

may unfortunately strike one of these years of intense epidemic disposition, when from some direction, probably evasion of quarantine, one case may occur, and then an explosion, like that of 1878.

In the whole of this business, gentlemen, there is an element of what is called luck, good or bad, that will exalt one as a minister of grace, and cast down another into the grave, while both may be equally deserving.

Thus it is, if misfortune, passing us, shall overtake our successors, we must stand upon this record and assuage the bitterness of their defeat rather than make of their calamity a pabulum to fatten our pride. Conscience will teach us the limit of our deserving.

When river commissions regulate the rainfall in the valley of the Mississippi, and prevent years of exceptional high water and disaster, boards of health will control this phenomenon of occasional intense epidemic readiness.

What is the conclusion of the whole matter?

If yellow fever, to exist here, must be imported or must originate, there are two possible avenues of danger.

It matters not what our individual opinion; it is the bounden duty of this board to guard every *possible* avenue of danger.

We must prosecute quarantine with a rigor, resorting even to non-intercourse, as though we have no faith in any other measure; while, on the other hand, we must urge municipal sanitation as though we doubted the absolute efficiency of quarantine.

It is suggestive that in certain cities formerly devastated by this pestilence, the scourge has ceased coincidentally with an improved sanitary system—Boston, New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Charleston, S. C. Simple coincidence does not repeat itself five times.

Absolute non-intercourse with infected ports can furnish the only positive guarantee against importation.

Quarantine alone, however rigidly enforced, is subject to two risks: First—The established fact that ships once infected and after that subjected to repeated cleansings, going into Northern waters, and even changing the crew, years afterward, coming again into tropical regions, have developed the disease on the high seas without having touched at a tropical port. Such a ship, having passed quarantine, may develop yellow fever at our wharf.

The second risk is evasion, or “running the blockade,”

an experience so common in the cases of besieged cities and blockaded ports.

In the history of war no city or port was ever so securely invested but that dispatches, and even goods and food, were run through.

Let the people of this city and State exact of us all that may be justly required. We promise it; but we promise no more. We promise to do all that energy and perseverance can accomplish, to the utmost extent of the means at our command. This is the limit of our responsibility.

However successful we may be; whatever measure adopt or course pursue, we must carefully avoid giving directly or inferentially assurances of our ability to prevent any particular disease.

The people are quick to put their faith and hope in anything which promises to control. However coincident, they are ready to conclude the relation of cause and effect. We must remember the reliance finally established in carbolic acid, and the terrible consternation that ensued upon the demonstration of its worthlessness.

While quarantine is theoretically protective, in practice, and tested by the exactions of scientific investigation, it is still an experiment, its conclusions not yet absolutely established. We must secure the full benefit offered by its rigid enforcement.

This matter of responsibility, gentlemen, does not rest solely upon the Board of Health. There are two equally liable: The board on the one hand and the city and State on the other.

Examining the other side, what is the actual relation that exists?

The press and the people have welcomed us most kindly, and have spoken in terms of great consideration, but have not hesitated to tell us: "This city must be kept healthy. This great work has been imposed upon you, and you are expected to perform it."

Here are the figures: In a district of 57,000 people we have two sanitary officers. In the Second District, population 45,000, are two officers. In the Third, 45,000 people, two officers. In the Fourth District, population 38,000, two officers. In Algiers, covering a vast area, 9,000 people, one officer. In the Sixth and Seventh Districts, population 22,000, scattered over several square miles, is one officer. Pay of officers, \$50 per month; annual allowance to Board of Health from city \$6,000, annual

allowance to Board of Health from State, a resolution of thanks.

But for the scanty and contested pittance gleaned from quarantine and the yet smaller mite from the office of Recorder of Marriages, Births and Deaths, we would be absolutely penniless.

Our city and State are become to us as Egyptian taskmasters: "Go, therefore, now and work, for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks." We have the strongest historical assurance that it was something more than coincidence when pestilence overtook these same taskmasters.

When we undertake to accomplish a \$50,000 work with \$6000, and the work of eighty men with ten men, without horse or cart, this is a responsibility which rests upon the city of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana.

We entertain neither doubt nor fear; but will move steadily on in the line of our appointed work, and do with our limited means the best we can.

While some delight to bark and bite, for 'tis their nature to, we shall command the confidence and respect of every honest mind at home and abroad, and our consciences will approve our deeds.

On motion of Mr. Smallwood, the address was unanimously endorsed by the board.

NEW ORLEANS AUXILIARY SANITARY ASSOCIATION, }
Office No. 10 Carondelet street, }
April 18th, 1884. }

Joseph Holt, M. D., President of the State Board of Health of Louisiana:

DEAR SIR—At the regular meeting of the Executive Committee of the New Orleans Auxiliary Sanitary Association, held April 17th, 1884, the following action was taken and unanimously adopted:

"WHEREAS, The New Orleans Auxiliary Sanitary Association has always desired and advocated cordial co-operation with all sanitary organizations, without as well as within this city, and continues especially anxious to be a hearty and efficient auxiliary to the Board of Health of the State of Louisiana,

Resolved, That this Association emphatically endorses, and will rigorously maintain the wise policy foreshadowed in the various resolutions adopted, on April 12th, 1884, at the first meeting of the reorganized Board of Health; and that the members of this Association earnestly appeal to their fellow-citizens to contribute liberally to the means to enable them to give to the State Board, which is inadequately supplied with funds by the public treasury, the efficient aid indispensable to protect the health of this city; and,

WHEREAS, The execution of any policy is apt to give rise to honest differences of opinion and unfriendly misunderstandings,

Resolved, That all members of the State Board are invited to be present at the meetings of this Association, and that the President of the State Board, or any member delegated by said Board, is solicited to exercise in future the right hereby given, to explain in person, at any meeting of this Association, any matter which concerns the sanitary welfare of this city, and especially any such matters as may cause, or may have caused a difference of opinion and thereby failure of cordial co-operation.

Resolved, That an official copy of the above be sent to the Board of Health.

EDWARD FENNER, President.

THOMAS S. ELDER, Secretary.

NEW ORLEANS, April 21, 1884.

To the President and Members of the State Board of Health:

GENTLMEN—The following preamble and resolutions were adopted by the New Orleans Medical and Surgical Association at a meeting held on the 19th inst.:

Recognizing as we do, in the recent reorganization of the State Board of Health, reason for congratulation and an earnest of concerted action in the future:

Resolved, That this Association extend the offer of cordial fellowship to the new Board.

Resolved, That we will endeavor to establish harmonious relations on all points, and that this Association will, in the future, be ready and willing to advise, consult or aid heartily the new Board when such advice or assistance shall be requested.

E. T. SHEPARD, M. D.,
President.

A. MC SHANE, M. D., Secretary.

ROOMS ORLEANS PARISH MEDICAL SOCIETY, }
New Orleans, April 29, 1884.

Dr. Joseph Holt, President Board of Health, State of Louisiana:

SIR—At the regular monthly meeting of the Orleans Parish Medical Society, held Monday evening, April 28, 1884, the following resolution was introduced by Prof. S. E. Chaillé and unanimously adopted by the society:

Resolved, That the Orleans Parish Medical Society cordially endorses and will cheerfully co-operate with the Board of Health of the State of Louisiana, in the policy indicated in the resolutions adopted by said Board at its meeting of reorganization, April 12, 1884, and by its President in his inaugural address, April 24, 1884.

P. B. McCUTCHON,
President.

J. H. BEMISS, M. D.,
Recording Secretary.



